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RESEARCHING JOHN MONASH

Ann M. Mitchell

I began taking an interest in the publication history of the standard biography of John Monash by Geoffrey Serle (Melbourne University Press, 1982) after becoming seriously acquainted with the book in 1999. My purpose here is to examine circumstances associated with the publication of that biography and its reception by the reading public. I show something about the privileges and responsibilities attaching to the Monash family inheritance of private papers, and about the practical difficulties confronting Dr Serle as his work took shape. The last word has not been written about the life and times of John Monash and his forebears.

The context for Geoffrey Serle's undertaking

Serle noted that many individuals were keen to be the first to produce a biography following Monash's death on 8 October 1931[1]. At least two experienced writers got as far as obtaining commissions from publishers. They undertook research for and writing of full-scale biographies that were never to appear, although they did publish useful research papers (Brasch 1959 and Perry 1959, 1961)[2]. Another five proceeded to publication with slightly different objectives. Two were journalists working for the State Electricity Commission (Northwood 1951, Edwards 1970)[3]. A third was the English military historian A. J. (Jack) Smithers (1973)[4]. Two others wrote papers about Monash and the SEC for specific academic audiences (Spaull 1969 and Holmes 1970)[5]. In addition there have been countless commemorative addresses devoted to the reputation of John Monash delivered before and since 1982. But for further original work interested readers should start with the reference list attached to my forthcoming paper: 'The University Namesake: John Monash (1865-1931)'.

Both SEC men, especially Vern Northwood, had family co-operation and produced still-useful and well-illustrated small monographs giving uncomplicated accounts of Monash's life story. Working from abroad, Smithers could not obtain access to the private papers but his reason for pressing on was a congenial one. British historians had overlooked the contribution to the war effort made by Britain's imperial partners and Smithers thought this was unfair. Geoffrey Serle was acknowledged for assistance rendered. Serle obviously thought well of Smithers because he visited him when in England for his own research in 1979 and later paid tribute in his preface[6]. Smithers' work was published three years

before Serle started his own and may well have stimulated the latter's interest in doing something about John Monash.

Given this background, it is important to know the terms under which Dr Serle agreed to do his biography, since denial of access to the private papers by the owners had been a source of misunderstanding for years and the record should be set straight.

Private property is precisely that. Custodians of family papers may seek advice from professional archivists or historians but they are not compelled to follow it. If they wish to destroy some or all of their papers – and sometimes they do – then that too is their right regardless of consequences. Individuals wishing to access private property have no choice but to obey owners' rules. Negotiations must depend upon professionalism and trust and this works two ways. This fact of research life is often under-estimated yet it is critical to understanding the constraints operating on all who work with privately-owned papers.

The outcome for the very large collection of Monash Papers (in excess of 250 Type A archives boxes at the National Library of Australia alone) was that these remained under the control of Monash's daughter Bertha and her husband Dr Gershon Bennett for the better part of 50 years until an acceptable biographer was found. They were cautious for a reason, having a very good idea of what was in those papers. Propriety dictated a need for reticence until many of the key players in the game of Monash's life had died. There could be no question of any rush to judgement when privacy for others as well as Monash family members was at stake.

The Bennetts maintained the collection for about 30 years until it was time to sell the Monash residence Iona in Toorak in 1962-63. The papers were then moved to Canberra under a special arrangement with the National Library of Australia (NLA). They remained closed[7].

Serle's status as biographer

Serle's biography was not a commissioned biography. Certainly it was 'authorised' in the sense that he was given exclusive access to the papers for the purpose of writing the book. But the family neither paid for the work to be done nor exercised any intellectual control over the final manuscript. Having decided to let go that is exactly what they did. Yet it would be foolish to suppose that the family was without influence. Dr Serle needed their collective insights. Moreover, Monash's grandchildren and Serle and his circle were of the same generation: they grew up together, were educated together and, if male, went to war at about the same time. Their intellectual and social values were shared.

So the question arises: how was the work paid for? Serle summed it up succinctly during an interview with the columnist Stuart Sayers: 'I had a whacking great salary to do it,' he said He was well aware that the extent of university

sponsorship for the biography was 'far greater ... than is normal' which is why the university shared the royalties and has owned the copyright outright since the author's death. The publisher, Melbourne University Press, also heavily subsidised the work. Innocent of the terms of Serle's employment contract with the university, they claimed a significant loss on the first two impressions even suggesting that the press's commitment was greater than that of the university[8].

What was not generally appreciated at the time was that Dr Serle's career was then in transitional mode. By arrangement between Monash University and the Australian National University with effect from 1 July 1975 his obligations to Monash were reduced by half to allow him to take up the prestigious appointment of joint editor of the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (ADB). He was 53. Only a few months later his contract with Monash University was further modified in relation to his private arrangement with the Monash heirs to undertake the biography of John Monash. He started the research in January 1976. The university agreed to relieve Dr Serle of practically all other duties. He did not relocate his household but divided his time between Canberra and Melbourne according to whichever responsibility had priority[9].

Gavin Souter published a fascinating article in the *Sydney Morning Herald* (13 March 1976) under the header 'The Monash Mystery'. It begins:

> Some weeks ago Dr Geoffrey Serle...had to collect something from the National Library of Australia. It was too big for the library to post, and far too valuable to be risked on the New South Wales or Victorian railways. So Dr Serle hired a panel van, drove it to Canberra himself, and packed it with about 100 cubic feet of cargo...[containing] most of Sir John Monash's personal papers. At least six biographers or intending biographers of Monash would dearly have liked to see this material...

This article is so well informed as to suggest that Souter had possibly harboured ambitions to do Monash himself one day. But he explained to me that he had some under-utilised research left over from his book *Lion and Kangaroo* (1975) which provided the basis for his article. He wrote a clever, original piece about advancement by merit in a land of equal opportunity – and about what some powerful men did to try and prevent John Monash's rise to the highest military appointment available to any Australian in wartime.

Souter also speculated that perhaps the 'lady painter in whose company Sir John...was frequently seen after the death of his wife in 1920' – had something to do with family reluctance to open the papers. Doubtless it did, but probably not as much as we may think – after all, everyone knew about that affair and most of the evidence concerning it had been destroyed. All that the family spokesman David Bennett would say was: 'We have taken the view all along that the only useful biography would be one on which there were no restrictions, written by a competent biographer free to look at everything. Earlier, the time did not seem

appropriate...'[10].

Dr Serle transferred most of the private papers to secure storage at Monash University to facilitate his work on the biography. The papers remained there for five or six years. This was an onerous responsibility and one that aroused some jealousy, since with rare exceptions (Peter Pedersen – see below - providing one) Serle's access to the papers remained exclusive in accordance with the family's wishes. It was unfortunate that some who knew of the arrangement saw only the privileges and not the responsibilities of temporary custodianship, as well as the huge burden of work Serle had undertaken on behalf of both the ADB and the Monash biography.

There is not a shred of evidence to support Souter's observation that Elizabeth Bentwitch was a painter although Serle believed it was so. In his autobiography (1998), Rabbi Rudolph Brasch also repeats a story about her selling small pictures to hapless acquaintances at Yallourn but, as with so much hearsay about Lizzie, the story is not based on personal knowledge and the jury is still out[11].

Appraising the Serle biography

The book was a worthy winner of the National Book Council Award for Australian Literature in the year of publication, 1982. Yet for all its virtues there are still deep holes in this as in all other published accounts of Monash's life. The contemporary review literature reveals general agreement that Serle paid insufficient attention to the Monash family background in Europe and the domestic, social, economic and religious milieu in which John and his sisters grew up in Melbourne; to John Monash's professional achievements as a civil engineer; and to his work as a public administrator (especially at the State Electricity Commission of Victoria and the University of Melbourne). To this short list I have added gaps that cover my own special interests: Monash's relationship with Elizabeth Bentwitch of Melbourne and London; her family; Monash's appointment to represent the Commonwealth Government at the official inauguration of the New Delhi precinct six months before he died (Miss Bentwitch went too).

Though still small by comparison with Serle's overall achievement, some of these omissions are now being addressed by several scholars. Smarting at criticism, Serle was at pains to point out that he wrote a life not a 'life and times' – and furthermore, that in order to make the work more approachable by the general reader he had worked hard to keep it to one volume[12]. In fact the university press release announcing the project on 1 March 1976 indicated that he had determined upon a one-volume work before he had appraised the full extent of ther Monash Papers and other evidence at his disposal. As I have noted elsewhere this decision, whilst understandable, proved to be an error of judgement - so let us see how things worked out in practice.

Stuart Macintyre's insightful review, published in the Age (10 July 1982) provided a useful counterpoint to recognised deficiencies. Macintyre had no

doubt that 'the richness of the archival record and the complexity of the subject' made Serle's biography 'a major work of Australian history.' And he had a short-list of his own about highlights that shed new light on our understanding of: the Jewish community and its response to life in Australia; the engineering profession at the turn of the nineteenth/twentieth centuries; rivalries amongst Australian commanders during the First World War; problems of state enterprise during the interwar period; and, not least, the Melbourne establishment of which Monash was to become a part.

'One gets a tangible sense of how an elite works,' wrote Macintyre. Other reviewers were not so impressed by the Melbourne focus. Clyde Packer demanded the unattainable object of an Australian or national view of an individual life despite the fact that the life in question sprang from an intensely parochial society, riven by state rivalries, which even after participation in two world wars is still somewhere called 'Down Under'.

Was there anyone more Australian than John Monash in his day? He was proud of it and said so. Was not the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) Australian in character? Indeed, for a time I was distracted by the reviewers' opinions, for in addition to this inconsistency several read up on what their peers had said before deciding what they themselves thought about Serle's Monash.

The military myopia in most reviews of the Serle biography, as in the text itself, is stark; almost no one noticed the resulting imbalance in the life story as told (I will return to this in a moment)[13]. Macintyre thought that the war section was not a success but suggested the wrong reason that is - Dr Serle was 'too reluctant to make judgements.' Serle responded to this in his interview with Stuart Sayers a week later, stating that he sought, as he put it: 'to be as indirect as possible, to reveal the man progressively through the account of incident after incident'; yet, he continued, 'in the end I found that I had not nearly enough incident to display the various aspects of his character.'

Given the quantity of available data and the length of the published text, I find this an extraordinary statement. Surely we are entitled to expect that a privileged biographer of undoubted talent would be prepared to commit himself about where his evidence took him?[14] Perhaps Serle had Lizzie Bentwitch in mind, for in the absence of documentary evidence one certainly has to be clairvoyant to work out who may have imparted recollections about Miss Bentwitch without wishing to be quoted. It is not that near-contemporary insights are necessarily incorrect. The problem is that, with very few exceptions, we do not know who said what and on what basis.

As one gains familiarity with the biography, one does see that Dr Serle covered almost everything. But it is not an easy read, and the balance within this substantial book of 600 pages is questionable. I always have had a problem with the disproportionate amount of space accorded the war years when there was so much else in life as lived; and, it must be said, so much material in the family and

other papers that still has not been adequately assessed and used. The shortest example of what I mean here is to draw attention to the 200 pages devoted to a remarkable family background and Monash's first 49 years, and compare them with exactly the same amount of space devoted to the five and a half years of war and repatriation[15].

It is possible that Serle did not appreciate the significance of information (especially data about family events and movements) hidden in hundreds of non-English language letters between members of the extended family in the Old and New Worlds. Some of these letters had been given to Serle by the widow of Dr Benno Gerstmann. Serle subsequently deposited Gerstmann's letters at the National Library with a small deposit of his own, complementing his research and including the uncut version of his manuscript which was 70,000 words longer than the published text[16]. But of the non-English letters available to him, he preferred to concentrate on the love story between Louis Monash and Bertha Manasse, which admittedly is a very good story.

To be fair to Dr Serle, he had to work under severe time constraints. He did consider the possibility of a separate publication or publications devoted to Monash's diaries and the correspondence, but nothing came of it. The production of the biography was costly and his publishers probably believed that the market would not bear more books about Monash just then. Monash's war letters to his family in Australia already had been done[17]. Nor was the time ripe for publication of the intimate correspondence between Monash and his brother-in-law, the distinguished metallurgist Dr Walter Rosenhain of London's National Physical Laboratory, who has yet to receive adequate attention from historians of science.

Thus the decision to confine his biography to one volume came at a price. Even so, we cannot be surprised that Serle and the majority of writers and commentators on the life of John Monash then and since should have devoted so much of their attention to the military experience upon which Monash's fame rests. Packer actually wrote that were it not for the war there would not have been a biography – which goes to show how little he understood the resources at Serle's disposal[18]. This also raises the mare's nest of reviewer competencies which I cannot go into here.

For those interested, Warren Osmond's review entitled 'John Monash and the Australian Dream' is one of the most challenging reviews of a biography one will ever come across - not because it is perfect, but because Osmond recognised the complexity of our protagonist whom he aptly described as 'an engineer of the Self'[19]. It also took the only female reviewer published, Lyndall Ryan, to home in on the fact that Serle had failed to resolve the contradictions between Monash's private behaviour and his public image[20].

The war obsession evident in the new Monash biography was due in part to the existence of the monumental study of the first AIF, funded by government

and master-minded by Charles Bean throughout the greater part of his working life. Bean had spent four and a half years overseas as Australia's official war correspondent mostly in battle zones; and nearly 23 years between 1921-1942 at home with a small team – writing, editing and publishing the 12 volumes that make up The Australian Imperial Force in the War of 1914-18[21]. The very fact that the federal government supported the enterprise for so long is a clear indication that Australian participation in global warfare was already recognised as arguably 'the' defining moment in the development of Australianness. This was due in no small measure to Bean himself – regardless of the fact that mateship under battle conditions was an irrelevant concept for half the voting population.

Bean's work has given every other commentator on Australia's participation in the First World War something to start with. It cannot be avoided. In the same way, since 1982 no one can satisfactorily attempt an in-depth study of John Monash without the Serle biography and I too am dependent upon it – as much for its weaknesses as its strengths. Those who had tried to write about Monash before Serle and without access to the family papers were bound to fall short in performance. Indeed, I would go so far as to say that no one since 1982 (including me) has attempted to grapple with the entire range of deposits of Monash-related papers to be found in several locations in Canberra and Melbourne.

Time and again, writers on a variety of topics embracing some aspect of Monash's life have been content to cite Serle and leave it at that[22]. Others adapt the entire book to their own ends – most often for public addresses made to relatively small audiences – although some will now draw on the meretricious homage paid to Serle in 586 pages by Roland Perry in his book Monash: the outsider who won a war[23].

Notable exceptions based on sound research from primary sources include the focused study by Peter Pedersen on Monash as Military Commander which Pedersen began as a doctoral thesis some years after Dr Serle had commenced his own research. There are also several professional studies of Monash as engineer sponsored by the Monash University Faculty of Engineering and researched during 1994-96 by Geoff Taplin, Alan Holgate and Lesley Alves. This work has been continued by Alan Holgate in a private capacity and he is making it available via his own website[24].

Given the sheer quantity of material available, any thorough biographical study of John Monash grounded in evidence must be expected to take a long time to complete. I estimate that the existing total of specifically Monash material currently available in Australian repositories amounts to approximately 70 shelf metres, of which half is at the NLA[25]. Thus my final point about the sheer weight of the evidence involves examining how long it has taken the experts to publish the results of their studies. The outcome is sobering: Serle seven and a half years; Pederson probably more than the years of his thesis up to publication, a minimum

of six years; Holgate et al 12 years and still counting; Witkowski for his study of the Monasch family in Poland and the Jewish milieu in Krotoszyn, five years and still counting[26].

Make no mistake: scholarship is an expensive undertaking.

Appraising the evidence

We have examined the various sins of omission and commission by most students and observers of John Monash. Now let us take a look at the evidence itself.

In his skilful introduction to his biography's bibliography (p. 583), Serle stated that the family papers at the National Library comprised 'possibly the most extensive collection of private papers to have survived' in Australia. To this I may now add that there seem to be few comparable personal (as distinct from dynastic) collections anywhere[27]. Even so, some eight years' worth of correspondence between Louis Monash and his family in Germany dated 1854-61 has been lost. Serle states that this was due to the papers having been left unexamined in storage during John's East Melbourne period. Some loss or damage also could have occurred either when the whole family went bush in the 1870s or when items were retained for long periods by individual family members.

Monash's sister Mathilde, for example, probably destroyed most of her own diaries and certainly disposed of letters (not exclusively her own) on privacy grounds. Her papers should have had at least vestiges of a highly combustible 40-year correspondence with her sister Louise Rosenhain. In 1915 Mat actually informed John that she had destroyed some of their parents' letters, and that her friend Annie Hodgson had destroyed letters written by Bertha Monash to Annie's mother because the content was rather too revealing of circumstances in Bertha's later years[28]. Very little evidence of Mat herself survives other than the old family photographs that once were in her custody, and her exchanges with her brother – which he had kept.

Monash himself certainly destroyed some routine papers that may have included evidence of his father's financial failure. And he has been accused of wilfully destroying large quantities of official war records - but in this instance I am on the fence with Geoffrey Serle. I don't think wholesale destruction on the scale suggested (at least 20 linear metres) could have occurred and I have done the sums to show why[29]. Regardless of content and future use it was not in character for John Monash to authorise the destruction of important elements in any collection that he had taken pains to create. If he had been super-sensitive about how posterity would judge his reputation, why did he not destroy his confessional diary and more of his pretentious correspondence with young women? With the exception of the letters received from his lovers Annie Gabriel and Lizzie Bentwitch and his collection of erotica which were destroyed – he still left revealing evidence about all three![30]

The most obvious target for deliberate destruction of papers from the collection

now at the NLA is the correspondence with Elizabeth Bentwitch that Monash had kept until a short time before his death. This immediately begs the question: what was there to hide? Monash destroyed Lizzie's incoming letters and some photographs; and his son-in-law destroyed most copies of Monash's letters to Lizzie. The latter were mostly letterbook ('press') copies made on thin tissue snipped from the bound books. Index references at the front of all but one of the volumes affected were left untouched, so that calculating the probable extent of the losses is an easy matter.

Of the 80 letters known to have been sent to Miss Bentwitch by John Monash between 1915 and 1931 (not a huge amount over such a long period) only 17 survived. Only one of Lizzie's incoming letters survived from the same period (a letter of condolence over the death of Monash's wife, Victoria). The majority of Monash's surviving letters outwards had been dictated to and typed by a third party and then misfiled amongst other personal letters of the same period. His last known letter to Lizzie, dated 1 September 1931 and written within three days of being given notice of his impending death, was amongst the items destroyed. It was unusually long, consisting of eight handwritten folios and amongst other things would have confirmed the provisions he had made for her.

In the absence of the evidence it always will be possible to speculate about what may have been in the Bentwitch letters, but I doubt that Monash would have indulged in an erotic correspondence with his lover. Lizzie's writing style would not have been up to it. And in any case, he had another outlet for this type of expression in the narrative poem he had called 'Gulston' – which also was destroyed. As ever, it is possible to infer a lot from Serle's writing, but he probably avoided the implications of these destructions, innocent or not, for reasons of discretion[31].

Be that as it may, the consequences are doubly unfortunate for Miss Bentwitch about whom there is much to be said despite the absence of boxes of letters – his or hers – for her papers also have gone missing and almost certainly this too was an assisted passage (I usually say 'lost or stolen')[32]. Serle once stated that Miss Bentwitch had kept diaries in the twenties but we do not know how he knew that, and I certainly have not found any evidence thereof.

Publication history of the Serle biography

Because there is some confusion about the publication history, this final section endeavours to clarify what is known about the situation without benefit of access to the publisher's own files. The first point to be noted is that the history in the latest reprint is unintentionally misleading. The publisher's statement is as follows:

First published, 1982
Reprinted 1982, 1983, 1985
Paperback edition 1989
Second paperback edition 2002

I discovered at an early stage in my research that copies of 'Serle' were not only hard to find but extremely expensive when one did. So for a few years I bought them almost whenever and wherever they occurred (some went out again as gifts to interested parties). During this process I accumulated what I thought to be a complete run of all imprints. That was until I very recently discovered the 1989 imprint cited above - however, I have not yet seen the 1989 imprint. Whilst the long-awaited 'second' paperback edition (actually the third paperback issue) is described as published in 2002 it did not make its appearance in the bookshops until either February or March of 2003. This may have been due to a revised marketing strategy, and although this last point is pedantic it is offered in the interests of accuracy.

Until evidence can be produced to the contrary, the first paperback 'edition' was in fact 1985 and it was made up from unbound sheets of the 1985 reprint. There was also a hard bound reprint in 1990. Including the most recent paperback – already out of print, but vastly superior to its predecessor (despite white soft covers which always go yellow) – and assuming that each print run numbered about 2000 copies, there is a minimum of 12000 copies of the Serle biography either in circulation or in libraries. This is probably about as good as it gets for an academic biography in this country. In my opinion the best issue to go for is not the 'First' but the first reprint which appeared before the end of 1982 and was the only issue bound in genuine cloth.

The revised publication history is therefore:

First published, 1982
Reprinted 1982, 1983, 1985, 1990
First paperback edition 1985
Reprinted 1989
Second paperback edition 2002

Notes

1,2 R. Brasch, 'Sir John Monash', *Royal Australian Historical Society Journal*, vol.45, pt. 4, 1959. Brasch had launched into a full-scale biography but did not proceed to completion when he was unable to obtain permission to quote from the Monash Papers; see R. Brasch, *Reminiscences of a Roving Rabbi*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1998, ch. 23. Warren Perry published three articles, the first on Monash's military career in *Vic. Hist.Mag.*, Dec. 1957; the second about Monash's professional life also Dec.1957 in *AJHSJ*, vol. 4, pt. 6; and the third and arguably the most interesting because the most frustrated: 'Monash: The Biographer's Dilemma' in *The Australian Quarterly*, March 1961. Warren Perry also completed a commissioned biography in the late 1960s. He stuck to what he knew he could do well and was unlucky that his manuscript was rejected by the intending publishing house, which had been taken over during the writing of his book. The manuscript was deemed too long and lacked the personal dimension that we now know to be crucial to any adequate biography of the complex individual who was John Monash (personal information).

3 Vernon R. Northwood, 'Monash', *SEC Magazine*, December 1950, also published separately; Cecil Edwards, *John Monash*, SEC, Melbourne, 1970.
4 A.J. Smithers, *Sir John Monash*, Leo Cooper, London, 1973
5 Published as two of three related articles in a single issue of *Public Administration*, vol. 29, pt.3, September 1970. Andy Spaull wrote on Monash at the S.E.C.; Jean Holmes on Monash and Administrative Style; the third article by Cecil Edwards drew attention to his recently published official history of the SEC, *Brown Power* (1969).
6 Serle, *JM Research File*. Mrs Jessie Serle generously allowed me access to this research file which includes some correspondence pertaining to Serle's 1979 research trip.
7 Personal information; and see John Thompson, 'Let Time and Chance Decide', ch. 7 in Peter Cochrane (ed), *Remarkable Occurrences: The National Library of Australia's First 100 Years 1901-2001*, Canberra, 2001.
8 Stuart Sayers in *The Age*, 17 July 1982, Saturday Extra, p.14; Serle, Eldershaw Memorial Lecture, *loc. cit.* Most contract details pertaining to the biography are preserved on Dr Serle's official Monash University Staff file now in the Monash University Archives (access restricted). The generosity of the university in permitting access to this file is acknowledged. I have not seen the complementary MUP files, which also are restricted.
9 The biography was published in July 1982. Dr Serle officially retired from Monash University in 1984. He retired as Joint Editor of the *ADB* in 1988.
10 Gavin Souter, loc. cit., *Weekend Magazine*, p.13.
11 R. Brasch, Reminiscences, p. 221.
12 Eldershaw Memorial Lecture, loc. cit.
13 I take this opportunity to thank John Thompson of Canberra for his generosity in sharing his knowledge and several of the review citations deployed in this discussion before his own work was complete. I have not yet had the opportunity to read Dr Thompson's doctoral thesis, 'Geoffrey Serle and his World: The Making of an Australian Historian', ANU 2004. The work is soon (2006) to be published by Pandanus Books as *The Patrician and the Bloke: Geoffrey Serle and the Making of Australian History.*
14 It is unfortunate that Serle's *ADB* version of Monash published in 1986 (vol. 10) – which should be the preferred entry point for most readers unfamiliar with John Monash's life story – bears the hallmark of an author tired of his subject and anxious to move on.
15 The longer explanation is: 16 pp. of preliminaries; 69 pp. of appendices, notes, bibliography and index; 200 pp. devoted to life pre-war including some family background, education and professional development (50 years+); 200 pp. wartime and repatriation (5½ years); 125 pp. post-war including the huge public enterprise that was the SEC, his work for the University of Melbourne, his engagement with returned servicemen, Anzac Day celebrations, the building of the War Memorial, the stresses induced by fame, the outing of Lizzie Bentwitch (11 years).
16 Dr Benno Gerstmann was a Monasch family refugee from Vienna. A highly qualified electrical engineer, he was a much loved teacher at Caulfield Technical School, which became part of Monash University in 1992. A preliminary and by no means complete description of his and other overseas family correspondence now at the NLA is given in: Ann M. Mitchell, two draft series descriptions and item schedules prepared 2002 and deposited in the Manuscripts Reading Room: (i) *Family Letters from the Monash*

Papers [1857-1912]: A selection of early mostly non-English language correspondence from NLA MS 1884, Series 2; (ii) *Behrend-Sudfeld-Gerstmann Family Correspondence [1865-1940]: A series within NLA MS 6808: Geoffrey Serle Papers re his biography of John Monash (1982).*

17 F. M. Cutlack (ed), *War Letters of General Monash*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1934. Whilst not perfect this book is much to be preferred to that edited by Tony Macdougall, Duffy & Snellgrove, Sydney, 2002.

18 Clyde Packer in *Quadrant*, April 1983, p.88.

19 *Australian Book Review*, November 1982, pp.10-12.

20 Special thanks to John Thompson for this one, which I could not locate without his help: *The Institute for Modern Biography Newsletter*, December 1982.

21 Dudley McCarthy, *Gallipoli to the Somme: The story of C. E. W. Bean*, John Ferguson, Sydney, 1983.

22 A recent example of this type of homage is John F. Williams, *German Anzacs and the First World War*, UNSW Press, 2003. The earliest example occurred in an essay on leadership entitled 'Sir John Monash' by Bernard Callinan delivered as the Daniel Mannix Memorial Lecture in 1980, a little over two years before Serle's biography was published. Callinan paraphrased large slabs of Serle's unpublished text. The lecture was then published by Serle's own publisher, Melbourne University Press, in 1981 with an acknowledgement to Serle. How many of us would have been so generous in similar circumstances?

23 Random House, Sydney, 2004.

24 P. A. Pedersen, *Monash as Military Commander*, Melbourne University Press, 1985; Lesley Alves, Alan Holgate, Geoff Taplin, Monash Bridges: *Typology Study Reinforced concrete bridges in Victoria 1897-1917*, Monash University, 1998; and the Monash pages on Alan Holgate's website at http://home.vicnet.net.au/~aholgate/welcome.html

25 The most important collections of Monash-related papers are held in Canberra, by the National Library of Australia and the Australian War Memorial (personal papers); and in Melbourne, at the University of Melbourne Archives and the Public Record Office of Victoria (records of business activities as engineer and public administrator). In addition, the National Archives of Australia controls a limited amount of Monash material related to his army career and public service. I am most familiar with the papers at the NLA.

26 I have been working on my interests in families Monash and Bentwitch for over seven years, and though much has been written and some presented, very little has been published to date. The Witkowski work referred to is his new critical edition of *Bar Loebel Monasch 1801-1879: Memoirs*...[with introduction and annotations, of the original German text and translations into English and Polish], Krotoszyn Historical Society, Poznan, 2004.

27 My prospecting expedition during 2004 for Monasch family material abroad produced some charming items of nineteenth memorabilia, some late nineteenth century photographs and no correspondence. It is impossible to over-estimate the importance of the NLA's MS 1884 and the much smaller companion collection buried within MS 6808.

28 Mathilde to JM 14 November 1915 in MPs 111/830. Mat's justification for the vandalism was specious: neither John nor Louise knew she had the letters and therefore they would not miss them. She then proceeded to quote from her recollection of the content, which she had read again before burning! Imagination and sensitivity were not Mat's strong points.

29 The Serle biography reference is p. 584. The most explicit account of available military records having particular reference to Monash is in the bibliography of Pedersen, op. cit, pp. 338-43. Six years later, Denis Winter drew attention to the alleged loss of 90 per cent of Monash's military operations papers reputedly contained in 150 small boxes (approximately the size of a modern Type-A archives box – or a total of over 26 shelf metres in modern parlance). The implication is that Monash was directly responsible for the destruction of most evidence of his battle operations including so-called 'war diaries.' This hardly seems credible given Monash's lifelong interest in recordkeeping and it is unfortunate that Winter did not offer proof of the existence of the 150 boxes. The eventual deposit of Monash military papers to the AWM was only 3.8 m. and this transfer was not completed by the family until 1958 (AWM Series Description 3DRL/2316). Claims that Monash tampered with the evidence were in circulation long before Winter published his analysis of First World War military records in *Haig's Command: A Reassessment* (Viking, London, 1991; pp. 310-311). The allegations may have emanated from the office of C.E.W. Bean, since Serle knew of but was not inclined to believe them. An Australian War Records Section was not established until 1917. Whilst Monash was still in London in 1919, a hunt for diaries and other material thought to exist was prosecuted by one of Bean's assistants, the Gallipoli veteran Lieutenant John Balfour. Monash and his former Brigade Major Lt-Col. McGlinn both testified then that their Gallipoli material had been sent to Egypt – *ergo* any losses were not their responsibility (JM to Mat, 5.08.1919, NLA, Monash Papers, 117/878). Monash also noted the want of experience in the early months of the war and doubted that anyone kept adequate records then – an observation supported by Pedersen's bibliography. In 1919 Balfour reputedly raided the war trophy chests that Monash periodically had dispatched home to *Iona* during the war years– before Monash himself had returned to Australia! It is not clear what Balfour took away. It is hard to see how Monash would have had the time to destroy large quantities of operational records at any time and especially not during his last twelve months in London. Over 20 metres of records is a lot for a busy general to cull or to remove from military storage under the noses of Bean and Balfour who were packing up the vast accumulation of official records for dispatch to Australia at the same time. In the field, all Monash's energies had been directed towards current operational requirements. He spent very little time at Australian HQ in London. As Director of Repatriation during 1919, Monash was so pre-occupied with his official obligations that he unwittingly neglected signs of his wife's deterioration in health whilst writing his book *The Australian Victories in France in 1918* in August. Monash had managed a huge correspondence throughout the war and most of the official paperwork he attended to personally was not separated from his private papers now at the NLA. Whether he personally maintained a war diary as such is debatable. It was the responsibility of his Staff Officers to ensure the preservation of official orders, correspondence and

the like and make the arrangements for transfer to military depots. Monash certainly kept pocket diaries in which he recorded private meetings and expenses throughout his life and he habitually wrote up daily notes on special occasions. However, he was never a diarist who religiously wrote up each day's events in detail. Cryptic reminders were more his style. He seems to have used his letters home as his primary/daily war record and whilst these letters were undoubtedly 'sanitised' because written for public consumption at the time, they were also mostly duplicated and dispatched by different routes at time of writing, to ensure that at least one copy survived (only two ships carrying his correspondence are known to have been lost). The biggest mistake Monash and his family made regarding his papers, was their well-meant attempt to separate the more obvious military elements from what was basically a fully integrated private collection, all in the name of the intended donation to the AWM. Like his contemporaries, Monash regarded the papers he generated during his war service as his personal property. The matter deserves a fairer appraisal than it has had to date. The main primary reference would appear to be AWM, 3DRL 6673, item 36 containing corr. between JM, CEWB et al. about papers and data required by Bean; see Michael Piggott, *A Guide to the Personal, Family and Official Papers of C.E.W. Bean*, AWM, Canberra, 1983.

30 Serle, pp. 583-4; MPs, Box 186/1330.

31 Serle, pp. 498-9, 523-4, 584. The analysis of what is missing is my own and based on surviving letterbooks for the relevant period in the NLA collection.

32 Lizzie's peripatetic existence militated against long-term preservation of private papers. She does not seem to have had a permanent home after 1901 when she and her mother settled in England. They mostly lived in superior boarding establishments and hotels and changed them frequently. Lizzie had a range of connections in London and Melbourne providing some continuity: her clubs, her bank, her solicitors, her travel and financial agents, and her trustees. I am still hunting for Bentwitch papers, though without much hope given that Lizzie died over 50 years ago.

End of Researching John Monash /